



REMARKS

U . S . E M B A S S Y R A N G O O N

110 University Avenue, Kamayut Township, Rangoon, Burma

May 20, 2013

Remarks by President Obama and President Thein Sein of Myanmar After Bilateral Meeting

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I want to welcome President Thein Sein to the United States of America and to the Oval Office.

Last year, I was proud to make a historic visit to Myanmar as the first U.S. President ever to visit that country. And now President Sein is able to return the favor by making a visit to the United States, and my understanding is that this is the first visit by a leader of Myanmar in almost 50 years.

Obviously, during this period in between there have been significant bilateral tensions between our countries. But what has allowed this shift in relations is the leadership that President Sein has shown in moving Myanmar down a path of both political and economic reform.

Over the last two years, we've seen a steady process in which political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, have been released and have been incorporated into the political process.

We've seen credible elections and a legislature that is continuing to make strides in the direction of more inclusivity and greater representation of all the various groups within Myanmar.

President Sein has also made genuine efforts to resolve longstanding ethnic conflicts within the country, and has recognized the need to establish laws that respect the rights of the people of Myanmar.

As a consequence of these changes in policy inside of Myanmar, the United States has been able to relax sanctions that had been placed on Myanmar, and many countries around the world have followed suit.

And this has also allowed the United States and other countries and international institutions to participate in engagement with the Myanmar government about how we can be helpful in spurring economic development that is broad-based and that produces concrete results for the people of Myanmar. And that includes the prospect of increasing trade and investment in Myanmar, which can produce jobs and higher standards of living.

But as President Sein is the first to admit, this is a long journey and there is still much work to be done. And during our discussions, President Sein shared with me the fact -- the manner

in which he intends to continue to move forward on releasing more political prisoners; making sure that the government of Myanmar institutionalizes some of the political reforms that have already taken place; how rule of law is codified so that it continues into the future; and the process whereby these ethnic conflicts that have existed are resolved not simply by a ceasefire but an actual incorporation of all these communities into the political process.

I also shared with President Sein our deep concern about communal violence that has been directed at Muslim communities inside of Myanmar. The displacement of people, the violence directed towards them needs to stop, and we are prepared to work in any ways that we can with both the government of Myanmar and the international community to assure that people are getting the help that they need but, more importantly, that their rights and their dignity is recognized over the long term.

As I indicated to President Sein, countries that are successful are countries that tap into the talents of all people and respect the rights of all people. And I'm confident that if Myanmar follows that recipe, that it will be not only a successful democracy but also a thriving economy.

We also discussed some very concrete projects that we've already initiated. For example, USAID is already working to evaluate how we can improve agricultural productivity in Myanmar that can benefit farmers, increase incomes, and improve standards of living in a largely agricultural country.

And we're also working, for example, on projects like improving the road that currently exists between Rangoon and Mandalay.

Finally, I want to thank President Sein for his participation in ASEAN and the East Asia Summit in which the United States is actively engaged in, all the countries in Southeast Asia, as part of our broader refocusing on the Asia Pacific region -- a region of enormous growth and potential with which we want to continue to strengthen our bonds.

So, Mr. President, welcome to the United States of America. We very much appreciate your efforts and leadership in leading Myanmar in a new direction, and we want you to know that the United States will make every effort to assist you on what I know is a long, and sometimes difficult, but ultimately correct path to follow.

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN: (As interpreted.) I would like to express my sincere thanks to President Obama for inviting me to come to the United States. Indeed, this is my very first visit to Washington, D.C., as well as to the White House.

And I am also very pleased to have this opportunity to discuss about the democratization process and reform process undertaken in my country.

Our two countries established diplomatic relations since 1947, a year before our independence. And since then we have been able to enjoy -- historically, our two countries have enjoyed cordial relations, and there were also exchange of -- high-level exchange of visit between our two countries.

But I have to say that in the past there were difficulties in our bilateral relationship. But now we are very pleased that our relations have been improved significantly, and I am very thankful that in 50 years I am repaying a visit to the United States at the invitation of President Obama. And I am very grateful for extending an invitation to me to pay a visit to the United States.

Now that our country, Myanmar, has started to practice democratic system, so we can say that we have -- both our countries have similar political system in our two countries.

As you all know, our government is just -- our democratic government is just two years old. And we have -- within the short period of two years, our government has carried out political and economic reforms in our country. Because we are in a very nascent stage of democratic - a democratic stage, we still need a lot of democratic experience and practices to be learned. And we have seen successes. At the same time, we have been encountering obstacle and challenges along our democratization process -- path.

The improvement in our relation is also in recognition -- U.S. government's recognition of our democratization efforts and our genuine efforts for democratization process in our country. And it is also due to -- thanks to President Obama's reengagement policy to reengage with our country so that we have seen improvement in our bilateral relation within a short period of time.

Myanmar, being a developing country, and as we are undertaking changes of our democratization reforms, it is a daunting task ahead of us. We encounter many challenges, such as the present -- our poverty rate in the country is quite high and we have very few job opportunity, and then as well as we have a -- we do not have much middle class in our country. And then we -- our people needs to be all familiar with democratic practice, democratic norms and values.

So we have a lot of challenges ahead of us, but we have to -- thanks to the U.S. government and the people support them for understanding that we will be able to encounter these challenges as we undertake the reform process in our country.

During my meeting with -- our discussion with President, as he has already elaborated, we discussed about the rule of law in our country; the strengthening of judicial bodies; the providing assistance so that our police and military force become professional forces. And then to reiterate, we also discussed what related to the poverty alleviation for the rural people and farmers, agriculture, development, as well as how uplifting the health and education sectors of our countries.

So we had a very fruitful discussion with President Obama, and then I must say that I am very pleased to have this opportunity to have a candid and frank discussion with President Obama. And I believe that I have my visit to the United States is quite successful and meaningful.

So for democracy to flourish in our country, we will have to move forward and we will have to undertake reforms -- political reforms and economic reforms in the years ahead. We will also have to -- we are trying our best with our own efforts to have political and economic

reforms in our country. But we will also need -- along this path, we will also need the assistance and understanding from the international community, including the United States.

And what I want to say is that President Obama has frequently used the word "forward." And I will take this opportunity to reiterate that Myanmar and I will continue to take the forward -- move forward so that we will have -- we can build a new democratic state -- a new Myanmar, a new democratic state in our country.

I thank you all.